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An

Inaugural Dissertation,

on



Leucorrhœa;

by

William W. Oliver,

of

Virginia.

1878

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Leucorrhœa, Fluor Albus or Whites.

Leucorrhœa is included by Cullen within the order hæmorrhœgia, and defined a "serous or puriform discharge from the same vessels, which in their healthy or natural condition pour out the menses. We shall not stop to discuss the propriety of his arrangement, as it is not likely to lead to any practical error; and his definition of the disease, though not strictly correct, is perhaps as good as any that has been offered.

With regard to the precise source of the discharge, writers on the subject are not at all agreed: some confine it to the inner surface of the uterus; others to the vagina; and others again, include under the term, discharges both from the uterus and vagina. Clarke considers the neck of the uterus as the most common seat of the disease; against which, it has been alledged, that it presents a surface too small for the production of a discharge so profuse as it not unfrequently is. Without denying that other parts may

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he occasionally involves, the best writers seem to agree that the vagina is the most frequent source of the discharge.

The matter discharged in leucorrhoea differs both in colour and consistence at different periods of the complaint. At first, it is thin and glairy, very much resembling the white of an egg, and may be considered as natural mucus. In this early stage, the constitution is seldom affected. At a more advanced period, it is of a milky colour, and is generally, greatly increased in quantity. It may also be of a purulent nature, and all these discharges are occasionally mixed with a little blood, particularly in the advanced stage, when the discharge is purulent, and is supposed to indicate the existence of organic injury.

Leucorrhoea may be produced by causes acting on the general system, or it may result from local irritation, and has hence been divided into

idiopathic and symptomatic leucorrhoea. The first is to be considered as depending on the state of the system at large; the second as entirely local, and arising from some partial affection of the genital parts, the consequence of injury or any other irritating cause. When the discharge is very abundant, or when its quality is highly acrimonious, leucorrhoea is said to be symptomatic of a diseased condition of the uterus, or indicates a disposition thereto.

Among the Causes of idiopathic leucorrhoea, the most common are abortion, menorrhagia, excessive indulgence of venery, frequent or difficult labours, &c all of which are supposed to act by producing a laxity or loss of tone in the vessels, by which there is an increased quantity of blood determined to the parts.

As causes of symptomatic leucorrhoea, writers are, we believe unanimous in enumerating scirrhus, Cancer, polypus, prolapsus uteri &c

disposition and spirit of the American people
to be considered as standing in the state of
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and moving from most factors affecting
the general part the movement in progress
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and abundant, however, is said to be of
the state of a business condition of the state
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proper indulgence of every person in the
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in the world, by which there is no reason
quantity of labor returned to the fact.
the course of the American people
there are, we believe, numerous in some
other, which, however, is not the case.

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The causes we have mentioned are such as are calculated to debilitate the general system, but more particularly to impair the uterus and its appendages. By some writers it is contended that this disorder never arises from debility; but is always a primary affection of the uterus, or is occasioned by a change in the structure, position or actions of the neighbouring parts. That this is not invariably the case, is satisfactorily proved by the fact, that delicate women removing from a cold to a warm climate are extremely liable to the disease without the uterus having previously sustained any kind of injury. In moist countries and climates, also, where it is to be expected that the body would be impaired and the general system debilitated, we are informed that the discharge of mucus from the vagina is so abundant as to be exceedingly inconvenient to the women.

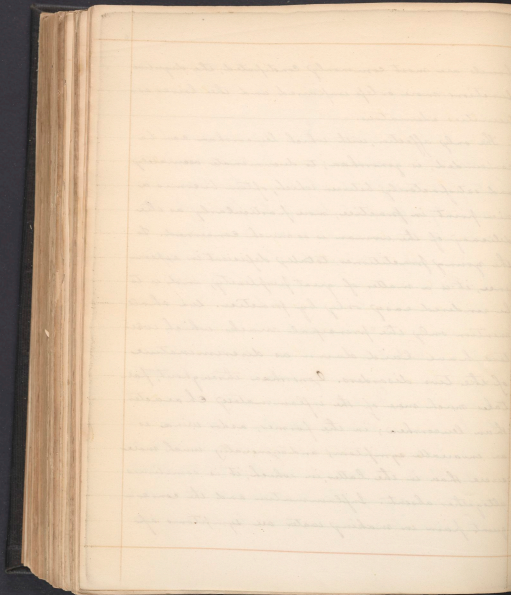
also, with few or none

The leucorrhoea, so prevalent in many parts of Holland, has been ascribed (by Leake) to the dampness of the climate. ✓

Leucorrhoea generally shows itself by the irregular discharge from the vagina, of a white, pellucid fluid, which is either diminished or entirely suppressed during the flow of the menses. As the disease advances, the discharge becomes variously discoloured, and sometimes, so acrid as to irritate and inflame the parts, with which it comes in contact; and hence the ardor urinae sometimes complained of. If the woman be of a full habit, there is not unfrequently a considerable augmentation of vascular action, accompanied by vertigo and head-aches. On the other hand, in a state of debility, it is attended by dyspepsia, palpitation and most of the other complaints which are connected with debility. In the former, we recognize the "leucorrhoea collida", and in the latter, "leucorrhoea frigida" of Boswin. The

bowels are most commonly constipated, the digestive functions more or less impaired and the lower extremities adematous.

The only affection, with which leucorrhœa can be confounded, is gonorrhœa; to discriminate accurately and satisfactorily between which, often becomes a nice point in practice; more particularly as the delicacy of the woman is so much concerned. To the young practitioner, totally deficient in experience, it is a matter of great perplexity, and is to be rendered easy only by practice. We shall mention only the principal marks which writers have laid down as discriminative of the two disorders. Gonorrhœa throughout, partakes much more of the inflammatory character than leucorrhœa; in the former, ardor urinae is an invariable symptom and generally much more severe than in the latter, in which, it is sometimes altogether absent. Inflammation and the consequent pain in making water are symptoms of



the early stage of gonorrhoea; whereas, in leucorrhoea they are the consequence either of a neglect of cleanliness or of the great acridness of the discharge. In gonorrhoea, the tumidity of the labia and neighbouring parts is greater - the inguinal glands are more apt to be enlarged, and the inclination to venery greater than in leucorrhoea: in the former, the discharge is constant and generally pretty uniform in quantity; in the latter, it is very irregular in quantity, sometimes being scarcely observable, at others as profuse as to occasion an alarming debility, and is either wholly suppressed or moderated at every period on the appearance of the menses. Should an inquiry into the circumstances we have mentioned fail of establishing in our minds the precise nature of the woman's ailment, we are directed to enquire into her character and connections; a direction which should be attended to in every case in which they are not above suspicion.

There are perhaps no diseases to which females are liable, better calculated to excite distrust and anxiety on their part, or from which, dangerous consequences are more apt to result than those of the genital organs. So extensive are their sympathies, and so powerful the influence they exert over parts, the undisturbed exercise of whose functions is essential to health, the constitution seldom escapes unhurt. From notions of delicacy, however, women not unfrequently conceal their diseases, and are willing to reveal them to the practitioner only after delay has aggravated all the symptoms or perhaps placed them entirely beyond the reach of his skill.

Taken in the commencement, and attacked vigorously, no disease is more manageable than the one under consideration; and perhaps few, in which delay enhances in a greater degree the difficulty of cure.

In the first place, the condition of the system-

the first of the series is a...
...the second is a...
...the third is a...
...the fourth is a...
...the fifth is a...
...the sixth is a...
...the seventh is a...
...the eighth is a...
...the ninth is a...
...the tenth is a...
...the eleventh is a...
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...the fifteenth is a...
...the sixteenth is a...
...the seventeenth is a...
...the eighteenth is a...
...the nineteenth is a...
...the twentieth is a...

whether plethoric or the reverse - and the nature of the disease, whether it be of an idiopathic or symptomatic character, are to be carefully ascertained, and the treatment directed accordingly.

If we find it dependent on any other disease, as scirrhus, cancer or polypus, it is to be considered only as a symptom, the removal of which can only be effected by curing the primary affection: if idiopathic, we are then to consider the general state of the system.

The woman being very plethoric or robust, the obvious indication will be to moderate the force and activity of the vessels; and this may be accomplished in a majority of cases, by a spare diet together with the use of the mild or purgatives: occasionally, however, venesection is requisite.

Having corrected the plethoric state of the system, or the disease having originally occurred in a weak constitution, a course somewhat

different, is to be pursued. As meeting the indications under such circumstances, a great variety of tonics, and various astringent injections have been recommended by most writers on the subject. Among the former, Cinchona bark, Columbus, rhubarb and the Chalybeates seem to hold the highest rank. The astringents which have proved most efficacious are solutions of the saccharum saluri, the sulphates of zinc and alumina, and a decoction of oak bark.

In a case of chronic leucorrhoea which during the last summer occurred in the Alms-house, Doctor Mitchell ordered tincture of cantharides, so freely diluted as to be scarcely sensible to the taste, to be thrown up the vagina three or four times a day; which had the effect of checking the discharge almost immediately, and the woman was accordingly discharged in a very few days. We have not met with an oppor-

tenity of repeating this practice, though from the very decided operation of the article in the case alluded to, it undoubtedly merits attention.

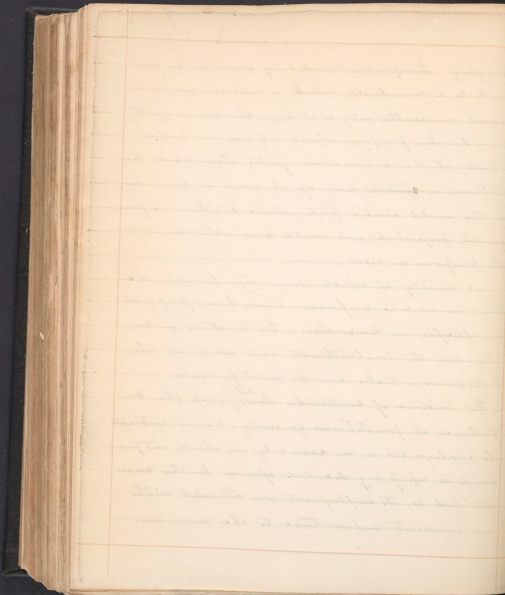
In the management of this affection, emetics have acquired a considerable reputation. they are supposed to prove beneficial, not only by cleansing the stomach and preparing the way for other remedies; but by making their own peculiar impression on the system, they effectually correct the vitiated secretion in which the disease essentially consists. Emetics exercise a considerable influence over most of the secretions - and from the well established sympathy between the chylific viscera generally, especially the stomach, and the genital parts, this employment in leucorrhoea, to say the least, ought not to be considered empirical.

Spice, it is thought, has something of a specific action, and is the article most commonly employed.

Purgings, though recommended by some to be carried to a considerable extent, is most commonly considered serviceable only as it keeps the bowels gently open. For this purpose, those articles are proper, which at the same time gently stimulate the system - as ~~small~~ doses of rhubarb or some one of the mild astringent preparations. Sulphur is frequently prescribed, and would seem well suited to the purpose in view.

A variety of articles, from their peculiar action on mucous surfaces, have been proposed as specifics in leucorrhoea. The tincture of Cantharides, the terebinthinate and some of the balsamic articles are the most popular.

The tincture of Cantharides does ^{not} possess the confidence of practitioners generally. Having witnessed its employment in one case only, we shall not presume to express any decided opinion. In the case alluded to, its employment was attended with no evident advantage to the woman.



the turpenthinatic articles, given in doses proper to excite diuresis, are famous in the treatment of gonorrhoea & gleet.

The negroes of the south are in the habit of treating these disorders, which they call "running of the reins," with a degree of success, scarcely surpassed in regular practice, with the common turpentine which exudes from the pine trees. From the analogy therefore, we would be naturally induced to think favorably of this class of articles, in the management of leucorrhoea. Doctor Chapman has known the oleum turpenthinae, administered in the dose of ten or fifteen drops repeated once or twice a day, prove serviceable in gonorrhoea, gleet and leucorrhoea.

Notwithstanding the importance which may be justly attributed to medicines in the treatment of this disease, it is perhaps not less from what have been termed minor obser-

cases, that good results are to be expected. Cleanliness, throughout, is of the first importance; hence, the parts should be washed frequently during the day with tepid water, and the patient's bed and body linen changed daily. By these means, we shall not only add greatly to the present comfort of our patient, but, will frequently prevent a most painful and troublesome excoriation of that part of the vulva ~~into~~ⁱⁿ which the discharge may accumulate. Although circumstances may render a variation of diet necessary, yet it should always be light and of easy digestion.

The woman should take regular and moderate exercise: carried to the extent of fatigue, it hardly ever fails to prove mischievous, by increasing the discharge, and adding to her weakness. The daily use of the cold bath, as a general tonic, will often prove beneficial; but it is contraindicated in those cases where there is considerable languor,

and should not be repeated when its use is followed by a sense of chilliness.

She should carefully avoid exposure of every description, but particularly to night air. the use of warm and relaxing articles of diet, immoderate venery, and an excessive indulgence of sleep, especially on a feather bed, are to be considered as predisposing to the disease, and should consequently be avoided.

